Ruth

INFORMATION FOR SMALL GROUP LEADERS

GOING DEEP:

Author and Title

The book is named for its main character, Ruth, a Moabite widow who married the Bethlehemite Boaz. She became an ancestor of King David (4:17, 22) and thus an ancestor of the Messiah (Matt. 1:1, 5–6). The author of Ruth is never named in the Bible. According to rabbinic tradition (Babylonian Talmud, Baba Bathra 14a–15b), Samuel is the author. This is unlikely, however, since Samuel died before David actually became king, and Ruth 4:17–22 implies that David’s kingship was an established fact at the time of writing.

Date

The mention of David (4:17) and his genealogy (4:18–22) places the writing after David’s accession to the throne (2 Samuel 2) in c. 1010 B.C. The narrator’s explanation of a custom once current “in former times in Israel” (Ruth 4:7) distances him from the story’s events, which occurred “in the days when the judges ruled” (1:1). Therefore, the book could have been written any time after 1010 B.C. by an author using accurate oral or written material as historical sources.
Theme

This book highlights how God’s people experience his sovereignty, wisdom, and covenant kindness. These often come disguised in hard circumstances and are mediated through the kindness of others.

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

Given the book of Ruth’s interest in all Israel (4:7, 11), it may have been written in hopes that the 12 tribes, which divided into two nations c. 930 B.C. (see 1 Kings 12:1–20), would reunite. The story itself takes place in the time of the judges (after the conquest and before c. 1050 B.C.), before a king was in place to reign over a united kingdom. This book explains the providential ancestry of David, who would become such a king.

Content

In the period of the judges, Elimelech, Naomi, and their sons leave Bethlehem because of a famine to sojourn in Moab (see map). Naomi’s husband, Elimelech, dies there. Mahlon and Chilion, the sons, marry Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Ten years later the sons die too, leaving no children. Naomi is bereft of family (1:1–5). Learning that the famine in Israel is over, she decides to return to Bethlehem; Orpah stays behind, but Ruth accompanies Naomi (1:6–22). At harvest time, Ruth goes to glean in a field that happens to belong to Elimelech’s relative, Boaz (2:1–23). Naomi knows he is an eligible kinsman-redeemer. Following Naomi’s daring plan, in a midnight encounter at the threshing floor Ruth boldly asks him, as a redeemer, to marry her (3:1–18). After a closer kinsman refuses to take Ruth, Boaz redeems all the property of the deceased and marries Ruth (4:1–12). They have a son, Obed, who becomes the grandfather of King David (4:13–22).

Ruth’s words in the book (as compared with Naomi’s or Boaz’s) are surprisingly few; the story, however, hangs on them. Ruth expresses her lifelong commitment to Naomi, “May the LORD do so to me … if anything but death parts me from you” (1:17), which takes her from Moab to Judah. She resolves to provide for Naomi (“Let me go … and glean,” 2:2), which brings her from Bethlehem to Boaz’s field. She invites Boaz to “spread your wings over your servant” (3:9), which leads her from childless widowhood to marriage and motherhood (4:13).
The Messianic Link

![Family of Ruth Diagram]

The Setting of Ruth

Set in the period of the judges, the book of Ruth records how a famine in Judah forces Naomi and her husband to leave Israel and move to Moab, where their sons marry Moabite women. When Naomi’s husband and sons die, she decides to return to her home in Bethlehem in Judah, and her daughter-in-law Ruth chooses to go with her.

Outline

I. Introduction: Naomi Bereft of Family (1:1–5)
II. Scene 1: Naomi Returns to Bethlehem with Ruth (1:6–22)
III. Scene 2: Ruth Gleans in Boaz’s Field (2:1–23)
IV. Scene 3: Ruth, at the Threshing Floor, Asks Boaz to Marry Her (3:1–18)
V. Scene 4: Boaz Arranges Redemption at the Gate (4:1–12)
VI. Conclusion: Naomi Blessed with a New Family (4:13–17)
VII. Genealogy: Extended Blessing (4:18–22)
FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

BIBLE STUDY FOCUS – “REDEMPTION”

MAIN TEXT: Ruth 1:14-18

Instructions for Small Group Time:

Option 1: Send the main text to small group members so they can read it ahead of time.

Option 2: Read the text together when you meet

Basic Bible Study Practices:

1. As people read the text, ask them to pay attention to key words
2. As people read the text have them highlight key words, people, and places
3. As people read the text have them pay attention to repetition of key terms, ideas, and people
4. If people are given the opportunity to read the text ahead of small group time, have them read it at least twice so they become familiar with its contents.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Read Ruth 1:14-18

1. Why do you think Ruth clung to her mother-in-law? Do you think it was because of appreciation? Fear? Or love?
2. Why does Naomi make mention of “gods” in verse 15 when talking about her other daughter-in-law?
3. Ruth was willing to suffer with Naomi. But more importantly she submitted herself to Naomi’s God, our God. What can we learn from her willingness to serve God, and not other “gods.”
4. Ruth’s response resonates with many other passages in Scripture. Ruth said, Your people shall be my people, and your God my God (Also read: Genesis 17:7; Exodus 6:7, Ezekiel 34:24, Ezekiel 36:28; Jeremiah 7:23). What do these
5. Ruth went from losing everything to full restoration. She re-married, was able to save her mother-in-law, and had children. What does the book of Ruth teach us about redemption and God’s love?

6. What does Ruth 4:18-22 have to do with the book of 1-2 Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles?

**EXTRA RESOURCES**

The Bible Project
Overview of Ruth: https://youtu.be/0h1eoBeR4Jk

Sermon on the book of Ruth:
https://youtu.be/jpE3wP93X9g

Social Media Image: (Use it to promote your small group study and to share God’s Word with others)